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DEPT FOR G/TIP (ROFMAN/DONNELLY)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: TRAFFICKER SENTENCED TO LENGTHY JAIL TERM

¶1. On March 3, a Gomel district court sentenced a local 59-year-old woman to 11 years in a minimum security jail on human trafficking charges. The unnamed defendant was convicted under the TIP-specific Criminal Code Article 181 "Kidnapping Human Beings for the Purpose of Exploitation," which allows for stiffer sentences in such cases. The court found her guilty of recruiting girls for sexual exploitation abroad "by deceit and abuse of trust." The judge also ordered property confiscation and BYR 1.5 million (USD 700) in compensation to victims.

¶2. Anti-TIP and drug trafficking police arrested the woman at a Belarus-Ukraine border crossing May 26, 2007 as she was attempting to traffic two young women to Turkey. The subsequent investigation established she had already trafficked over 10 women to the United Arab Emirates for sexual exploitation and made a profit of about USD 16,000 per victim. The police maintained the defendant was one of the founders of a criminal trafficking ring based in Gomel who reportedly had been convicted of a TIP-related crime and served a short jail term in 2001.

¶3. Pol/Econ FSN spoke to an independent journalist who covered the case. She surmised that the harsh sentence stemmed from the GOB's desire to boost TIP convictions and demonstrate its resolve to become a leading force in combating TIP in the region. In private conversations with the reporter, the victims admitted they sought the convict's assistance in organizing travel to work as prostitutes. As with the April 2007 case against the owners of a modeling agency accused of trafficking, the hearings for this case were held behind closed doors. Authorities contend this was done to ensure victims' privacy and security.

Comment

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¶4. The lengthy jail term for the convicted trafficker is an encouraging sign that authorities are taking prosecution of trafficking seriously. Though the victims in the case supposedly sought work abroad as prostitutes, the fact that authorities acknowledge this remains human trafficking is a positive step. That said, the goal of shielding victims' identities can be achieved without denying defendants their rights under the Belarusian constitution to a public trial.

Moore